

## GONZALEZ TRIAL

### Evidence was lacking in case

I served as a juror in the recent Eugene Joseph ("Joey") Gonzalez case. Based on that experience and my subsequent reading of articles regarding the state's case against Raymond Big Beaver, I have formed the following opinions:

1. The jury in the Raymond Big Beaver case, in convicting Big Beaver of misdemeanor assault, got it exactly right.
2. The Missoula Police Department's investigation of the death of Johnny Belmarez lacked the appropriate level of diligence and professionalism.
3. The state's continued prosecution of Gonzalez was overreaching and overzealous.

To be fair to the Missoula Police Department, I believe the finding of facts and credible evidence surrounding the death of Johnny Belmarez was, from the beginning, a difficult or near-impossible proposition. First responders noticed no obvious signs of a wrongful death, the location was obscured from general view, and there were no direct witnesses that were not under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

I am significantly less forgiving in my opinion of the performance of the state of Montana, as represented by Missoula County Attorney Fred Van Valkenburg. In light

of the evidence presented at trial, and given the verdict returned in Big Beaver's case, my opinion is that the state's case against Gonzalez was a long • shot at best and nonexistent at worst. I believe Gonzalez should have been released immediately after the verdict in Raymond Big Beaver's trial was returned. Further, I believe that the charges of deliberate homicide and criminal endangerment brought against both Big Beaver and Gonzalez were well beyond that which could be supported by the evidence presented at trial.

Thank you for your time.

*Greg L. Stricker,  
Missoula*

Exhibit No. 31

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